

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 037035

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:EAID, UNDP, WFP, LA, US

SUBJECT: CONSULTATIONS ON FOOD AID FOR LAOS

1. WE HAVE BEGUN INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS WITH CONGRESS TO SOLICIT CONGRESSIONAL VIEWS ON THE POSSIBILITY OF PROVIDING FOOD ASSISTANCE TO LAOS. AT THIS STAGE WE HAVE NOT MADE FOOD AID TO LAOS A FORMAL ADMINISTRATION PROPOSAL. OUR INITIAL SOUNDINGS ON THE HOUSE SIDE HAVE BEEN FAIRLY NEGATIVE, WITH MORE OPTIMISM FROM THE SENATE SIDE.

2. FROM OUR SOUNDINGS, IT IS CLEAR THAT BOTH SIDES OF CONGRESS ARE ESPECIALLY SENSITIVE TO ISSUE OF HOW DELIVERY OF ANY POSSIBLE U.S. AID WOULD BE HANDLED: 1) WHAT SORT OF ASSURANCES WE WOULD HAVE THAT FOOD WAS DELIVERED FREE TO THE NEEDY, 2) WHO WOULD HANDLE DELIVERY, 3) WHAT SORT OF

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END-CHECKS THERE WOULD BE.

3. AT THIS POINT, WE ARE NOT CERTAIN IF IT WILL BE FEASIBLE FOR THE U.S. TO RESPOND POSITIVELY TO LAO REQUEST FOR FOOD AID. IT WOULD ASSIST US IN OUR CONSULTATIONS, HOWEVER, IF WE COULD GET A BETTER IDEA OF HOW THE UN SYSTEM (UNICEF,

UNHCR OR WFP) HAS HANDLED FOOD DELIVERIES IN THE PAST AND
HOW THEY WOULD PLAN TO HANDLE ANY FOOD DELIVERIES IN THIS

PRESENT SITUATION.

4. ACTION REQUESTED: THAT YOU APPROACH UN OFFICIAL IN-
FORMALLY TO TRY TO GET FAIRLY DETAILED ANSWERS ON HOW
DELIVERY OF FOOD ASSISTANCE WOULD BE HANDLED. IT WOULD BE
PARTICULARLY USEFUL TO US IF WE KNEW WHETHER UN SYSTEM IN
LAOS MIGHT BE ABLE TO USE POSSIBLE U.S. CONTRIBUTION
THROUGH UN FOR SPECIFIC, UNOBJECTIONABLE PROJECT SUCH AS
FOOD FOR SCHOOL CHILDREN OR ASSISTANCE TO SEVERAL NEEDY
VILLAGES, WITH UN DELIVERING FOOD OR HAVING CLOSE END-
CHECKS ON DELIVERY. WE UNDERSTAND IT MAY BE DIFFICULT
TO GET UN ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS, ESPECIALLY SINCE
WE CANNOT REPEAT CANNOT GIVE ANY ASSURANCES THAT WE WILL,
IN FACT, PROVIDE FOOD ASSISTANCE TO LAOS. WE DO BELIEVE,
HOWEVER, IT IS NOW NECESSARY IN OUR CONSULTATIONS TO HAVE
MORE DETAILED ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS ABOUT DELIVERY.
IF YOU BELIEVE THAT EVEN CAUTIOUS INFORMAL PROBES BY
YOU WOULD RISK HEIGHTENED EXPECTATIONS WHICH MAY NOT BE
FULFILLED, WE WOULD OF COURSE AGREE TO YOUR NOT TAKING
REQUESTED ACTION.

CHRISTOPHER

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*** Current Handling Restrictions *** ONLY

*** Current Classification *** CONFIDENTIAL

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